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FAIRS OF INDIA



India is a land of dynamic diversity. Its recorded civilization is one of the oldest in the entire world history, dating back some five thousand years. A vast continent of nearly 870 million people, it stretches some 2000 miles North to South and about 1700 miles East to West and contains a bewildering diversity of languages, religions, races and cultures in the bosom than any other country in the world. It is because of this endlessly fascinating variety and richness that in its heyday, India used to be known as the "Golden Bird".

India is a land of great natural beauty, rich culture and religious mystique. Most of the world's religions have a home in India. It gave birth to Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. There is a strong undercurrent of unity running through this diversity and the people have always taken pride in their pluralistic culture.

"KNOW INDIA SERIES" books are designed to introduce the reader to this diversity and lead him through the long and fascinating journey of India's history, geography, mythology, art and culture.

This is a voyage of pleasant discovery.

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FAIRS OF INDIA

India is a colourful country inhabited by colourful people. We have a rich cultural heritage and the fairs and festivals constitute an intrinsic part of it. They are the reminders of the legends and events of historic importance in our rich and colourful heritage. Besides bringing gaiety and colour to the humdrum life of our people, these fairs and festivals — *mela* or *sammelan*, as they are commonly called — serve to unite the people in bonds of brotherhood and give them a feeling of emotional oneness which has been, and continues to be, a cementing force in our social fabric.

India's festival calendar is dotted with one festival or the other throughout. While some festivals have religious importance, particularly for certain ethnic groups, others celebrate the changing seasons, or simply the joy of life with singing and dancing. Some of these exuberant festivals and carnivals burst into a riot of colour and pageantry, dance and music.

The literal meaning of the terms *mela* and *sammelan* is meeting together, with slight variations. Whereas a *mela* (fair) is a traditional social get-together for which no invitation cards are issued, in the case of a *sammelan* it is customary to send invitation cards to the invitees. In the latter case, there is the consideration of age and merit, whereas in the case of fairs this is not even thought about. As such, fairs are more informal and enjoyable.

Fairs are held all over the world, but the number of fairs held in India is quite large. Most of these fairs are religious. In religious fairs too, there is an important role for trade and commerce to play. Some of these fairs are in memory of great men who sacrificed themselves for greater causes. Even the so-called 'economic fairs' are associated with some temple and/or some river. These days some fairs are being organised at the initiative of the Government, like the Book Fairs or the Handicraft Fairs.

Fairs are mostly held either in the plains, or on some mountain, or in the vicinity of some river or lake. They are also associated with some great men

or important events. They may be national, regional, or local. Kumbh is a national fair; the Garh Mukteshwar fair is regional, and the Phool Walon ki Sair in Delhi is a local fair. Fairs may also be national, but held at one place only, like the Kumbh fair. They may be national but held simultaneously at different places in the country on the same day like Makar Sankranti fair. They may also be associated with a particular place, like the Sonpur fair or with a particular project or scheme like the World Book Fair etc.

Every fair has the local 'colour' imparted to it. For instance, if one were to go to a Rajasthani fair, one would see the traditional Rajasthani dress, eat Rajasthani food, and buy Rajasthani handicrafts. One can come across local and national peculiarities during such fairs. In the national fairs one gets acquainted with different languages spoken in the country, the multi-coloured head-gears, ornaments, sarees and apparels, worn by different people and the local customs obtaining in different parts of the country.

Fairs are not only entertaining but informative also. In fairs one witnesses acrobatic displays, recitation of poetry, exhibitions, magic shows, etc. One listens to the sermons delivered by religious heads, Sadhus, Saints etc. from different parts of the country. The children come to know of several mythological and historical tales as also folk-lore associated with temples, rivers, ponds, lakes, mountains, gods, goddesses etc. Besides, fairs provide people opportunities of giving alms openhandedly and thus help them develop a sort of generous disposition.

It is only in fairs that we get a true glimpse of 'unity in diversity' prevalent in India. There is a regional or national character to be seen in everything around. Fairs are the best means of providing an insight into the religion, culture, history, geography and the socio-economic conditions of the country. That is why they are also known as 'mobile libraries'.

In every fair of India, one comes across peculiar features of different religions and religious sects of the country. One also gets an opportunity to hear the discourses of great and renowned religious leaders who stress that even if there is diversity, all religions preach universal brotherhood. So one might call the Kumbh fair as a national religious platform. These fairs have been held for centuries, and have greatly contributed to the religious and cultural oneness of the people.

Cleanliness and hygiene are two important problems associated with a big fair because lakhs of people gather at one place. Central and State gov-



ernments contribute in several ways to organise the events. Religious and social organisations also co-operate in the efforts to keep the place neat and clean, but mishaps do take place.

In the largely-attended fairs, sometimes women and children are separated from their families. Criminals, pick-pockets, and thieves have a field day. So the police and the people have to be extra-vigilant to catch hold of the guilty and punish them suitably. In India, every endeavour is made to keep the place of the fair as also its surroundings neat and tidy. According to our scriptures, spitting or making the place dirty in any way, particularly if it is near a river, is a sin. Therefore, those who go to attend the fair should take particular care to maintain cleanliness and decorum there. They should do good deeds and not indulge in sinful acts. Such a conduct on their part will be in keeping with the tenets of Indian culture.



KUMBH : THE BIGGEST NATIONAL FAIR

In India, the most important among national fairs is the Kumbh fair. It is indeed a big event organised on quite a large scale. Crores of people from different parts of the country throng the site of the fair. Only a line mentioning the date and place of this fair in the Hindu calendar is indication enough of the holding of the fair. Thousands of foreigners attend the fair only to have a peep into the Hindu customs, traditions and philosophy.

This fair is held only at four places, viz. Haridwar, Prayag, Ujjain and Nasik. Since *Purna* Kumbh is a 12-yearly fair, Kumbh is held at each of the four places every three years. At Haridwar and Prayag, between two *Purna* Kumbh fairs, the *Ardh* Kumbh is also held every six years.

Our forefathers had fixed different timings for the Kumbh fairs at the said four places on the basis of astrology. These timings are being scrupulously observed even today. Astrologers have divided planetary bodies into twelve categories, namely, (1) Aries, (2) Taurus, (3) Gemini, (4) Cancer, (5) Leo, (6) Virgo, (7) Libra, (8) Scorpio, (9) Sagittarius, (10) Capricorn, (11) Aquarius and (12) Pisces.

Various planets like Mercury, Saturn, Earth, Moon, Jupiter etc. which revolve around the Sun take a definite time to complete a circuit. To move from one zodiac sign to another, the Sun takes approximately one month, the Moon two and a half days, Jupiter about one year, and so on.

When the Sun enters a zodiac sign, it is called '*Sankranti*'. For example, when the Sun enters *Makar* (Capricorn), it is called *Makar Sankranti*. *Sankranti* is mostly around the 14th day of a month. *Makar Sankranti* is on 14th January while *Maish Sankranti* is on 13th April.

The planetary positions for the *Purna* Kumbh are as follows:

Place	Sun sign	Moon sign	Jupiter sign
Prayag	Capricorn	Capricorn	Taurus

Haridwar	Aries	Aries	Aquarius
Nasik	Cancer	Cancer	Leo
Ujjain	Libra	Libra	Scorpio

The Kumbh at Prayag is held at the confluence of the Ganga, the Yamuna and the invisible Saraswati in the month of January/February. The Kumbh at Haridwar is held on the bank of the Ganga in the month of April. The Kumbh at Nasik is held in the month of July on the bank of the river Godavari. The Kumbh at Ujjain is held in the month of November on the bank of river Shipra.

The Kumbh fair has been held since time immemorial. Aadi Shankaracharya regarded this fair as an instrument to bring about national unity and to awaken religious feelings among the masses. All his followers, householders or Samnyasis consider it their sacred duty to go to the Kumbh. Shankaracharya had divided his Samnyasi followers into ten groups, called *Dashanami Samnyasis*. These are : Tirth, Ashram, Bharati, Saraswati, Van, Aranya, Parvat, Sagar, Giri and Puri. During the Kumbh fairs, all these ten groups, along with several other Hindu religious sects — their preachers, followers and leaders — participate in religious discourses. They not only meet each other but also exchange ideas. Lakhs of Hindu devotees, both men and women, young or old, stay in the *ashrams* of saints and *sadhus* and carry out *kalpwas*. During *kalpwas*, they observe fast and perform other religious rituals. They stay on the bank of the river in small huts, sleep on the ground, listen to religious discourses regularly, give alms and take whatever simple food is served to them in the *ashram* and, that too, only once in a day. They take bath thrice in a day and gladly accept hard, self-imposed disciplines. Thousands of Hindus go through these rituals to gain spiritual and philosophical knowledge and insight into the mysteries of life and death. Thus they are spiritually enriched. There is no festival in the world which can equal the Kumbh in teaching moral and religious values.

It is in the Kumbh fair that one comes across preachers, intellectuals, learned men and priests from all castes and creeds, and benefit from their discourses. One is really surprised to see the big congregation of *sadhus* and saints in the Kumbh fair. The arrangements made for distribution of food, living facilities, preaching, etc. at the fair are, to say the least, beyond compare. When one sees the vast congregation of the rich and the poor, the educated and the uneducated strictly following the rules laid down by the saints, one

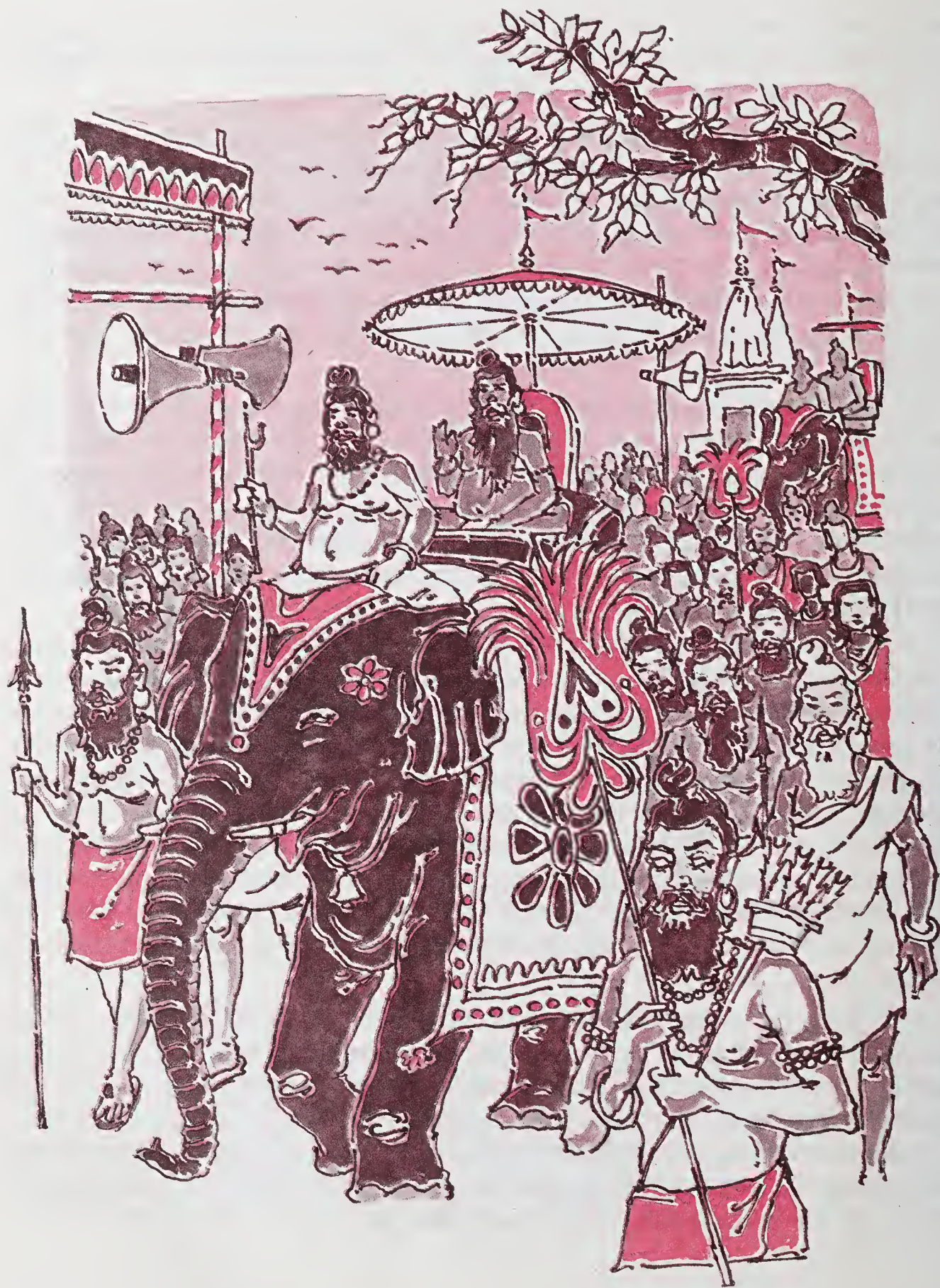
feels convinced that India is basically a religious country. This fair imparts knowledge of the true Indian traditions and cultural values, and it is indeed a rare luck to participate in such a fair.

In the Prayag Kumbh, it is customary to have at least three holy baths in the river on Makar Sankranti, Mauni Amavasya, and Vasant Panchmi. As many baths in the river are necessary in the Haridwar Kumbh. These are on Shivratri, Chaitra Amavasya and Maish Sankranti. At Nasik, there should at least be four holy baths in the river on Shravan Amavasya, Singh Sankranti, Shravan Purnima and Bhadra Krishna Ekadashi. At Ujjain, there are to be three holy baths in the river on Maish Sankranti, Vaishakh Amavasya and Vaishakh Purnima.

The importance of these fairs is accepted by one and all. Even the saints who have been leading a secluded life for a long time consider it an act of righteousness to go to the Kumbh fair where we can see the entire country in miniature. People participate in the fair with abandon forgetting their caste, creed, financial status, education, literacy, age, sex etc. Even differences in languages do not come in the way of communicating with one another. Sanskrit and Hindi are widely used.

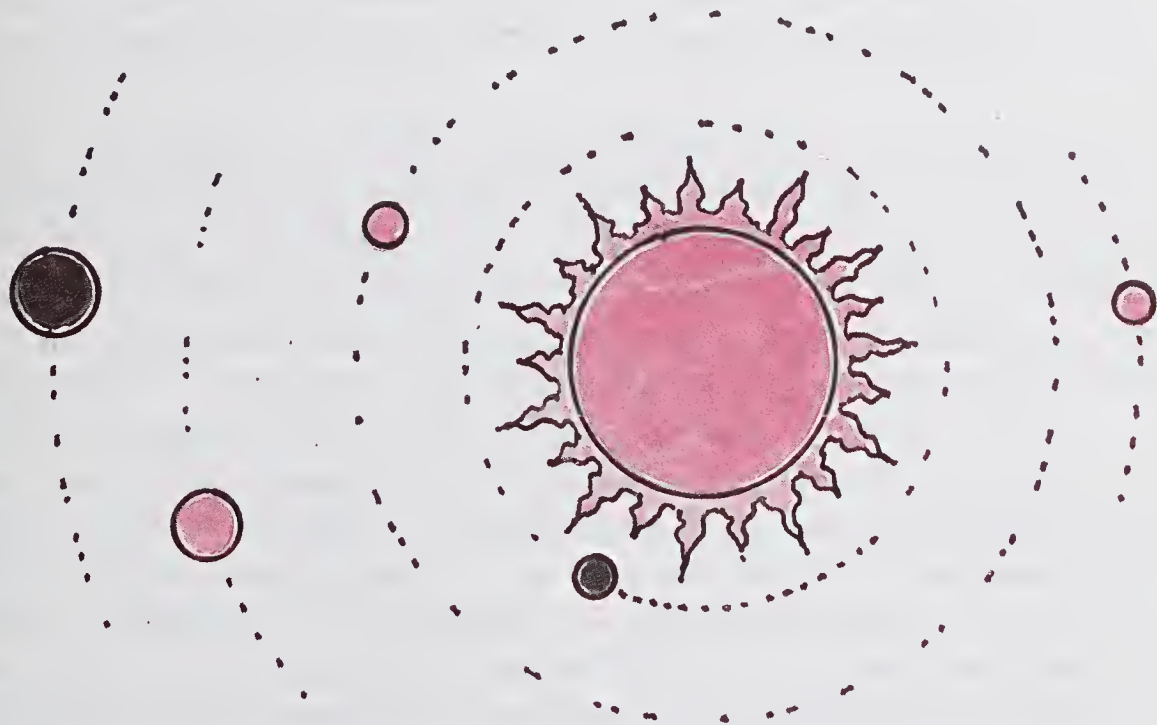
Kumbh fairs are without parallel even in the matter of people's participation. In February 1989, the Government had estimated that at least one and a half crore people would take bath during the Prayag Kumbh, but the number exceeded four crore. During this fair, a sort of 'Kumbh city' was set up as far as Jhoosi, Daraganj, fort and the cantonment. About ten lakh people had observed *kalpwas* for one month. The entire area was looking majestic with small cities and *ashrams* all around. At all times one could hear *kirtan*, *katha* (holy discourses), devotional songs, and *aarti*. The sight of lakhs of devotees taking bath in biting cold and offering milk, flowers, sweets, earthen lamps, etc. to the holy Ganga was breath-taking. On top of this were the processions taken out by the *sadhus* and saints.

Even today the spectacle of hundreds of children going through the 'Mundan' (head shaving ceremony) and other rituals on the bank of the holy Ganga reminds us of the glorious history of the ancient Indian culture and tradition. More than 1300 years ago, King Harshvardhan had given his all in charity, taken off his royal robes and put on an ordinary mortal's clothes at this very place. King Akbar had himself visited the site in 1554 and was wonder-struck by the congregation of so many persons.



In Hindu mythology, there is an interesting story about *amrit manthan* (churning of the ocean) and the spilling of nectar. When, finally, the pitcher of nectar appeared on the bed of the ocean, the gods took the pitcher and started running. They were chased by the demons. During this flight, a few drops of nectar spilled over and fell at four places. These four places are now sacred spots where the Kumbh fair is held. Even today, the 'nectar' of national integration smells sweet at these four places.

It is worth noting that at some other places in India equally big fairs are held; for example, when Jupiter enters the Leo zodiac sign, Pushkar fair is held on the bank of river Godavari. This was started by King Mahendri of Andhra Pradesh. Similarly, when Jupiter enters the Libra zodiac sign, a fair is held in Tamilnadu, near Kumbhkona, which is known as Mahamakham Fair. Jupiter remains in a zodiac sign for one year. So religious rituals, performances, and discourses continue throughout the year. During the first month, the festivities are at their peak.



NATIONAL FAIRS

A big festival like the Kumbh, no doubt, draws people from different parts of the country in large numbers, say in crores. But such a big fair cannot be organised every year in so vast a country as ours, for obvious reasons. That was why our ancestors thought of holding other big fairs at the same time in different parts of the country with a view to promoting cultural oneness. Ganga fair is held on Purnima (full moon day) of Kartik month (October-November), Shakti fair (of Goddess Durga and Kali) during Navratras, Vijayadashmi fair and Ramnaumi fair, Shree Krishna Janamashtami fair and Makar Sankranti fair are also held. Besides, there are the Id and the Christmas fairs celebrated by Muslims and Christians respectively in various parts of the country. Then there are fairs on solar and lunar eclipse days. These national fairs have charm of their own.

Ganga Fair : This fair is held on the full moon day (Purnima) of Kartik month. It is held on the 15th day after Deepawali which is in the autumn season, and so the weather is rather cold. And yet lakhs of people take holy bath at different places on the banks of river Ganga. Religious people along with their families spend three to four days during this fair on the banks of the Ganga or the other rivers. The Ganga fairs held at thousands of places like Haridwar, Prayag, Varanasi, Patna etc. are really worth witnessing. In Uttar Pradesh, there is a big fair at Garh Mukteshwar where people from Delhi, Meerut, Moradabad, Ghaziabad, Bulandshahr, etc. assemble in lakhs. These include men, women, children, rich and poor, villagers and city-dwellers. In District Badaun, people from thousands of villages come to take part in the fairs held at Kachhla and Kakora. Innumerable small stalls are put up at these fairs to cater to the needs of the visitors. There are arrangements for entertainment, and even movies are shown. The people put up makeshift tents and enjoy themselves on the banks of the Ganga in this season of severe cold.

Navratra Fair : In India, people have been worshipping the Goddess

Durga in different incarnations for centuries. In the month of Chaitra (March-April) when the Hindu New Year starts, Navratra celebrations take place throughout the length and breadth of the country for nine days. Likewise, during Ashvin (October-November), such celebrations start nine days before Dussehra and end on the Dussehra day. In Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and in the Hindi belt of the country, the celebrations are on a very grand scale. The *Durga Puja* celebrations in Bengal are without parallel. Idols of Goddess Durga and Kali are worshipped during the Navratras. On the Dussehra day, all these idols are taken out in processions from various streets and immersed in the nearby river. Devotional songs, beating of drums, and performance of other religious rituals add sanctity and colour to the occasion, thus providing both, entertainment and religious atmosphere in these fairs.

Ramlila Fairs : During Navratra celebrations (March-April and October-November), the famous story of Lord Rama, as depicted in the epic poem known as *Ramayana*, is recounted and enacted in phases on the stages specially erected for the purpose. This stage-performance or the Ramlila, as it is commonly called, is organised at lakhs of places all over the country and Delhi alone accounts for over 10,000 such Ramlilas. At certain places, the performance is of very high standard and is arranged on a gigantic scale. Big fairs are held at such sites. In such fairs, religious books are also sold. The majority of people combine this with fun, and eat savoury delicacies from the many stalls that are temporarily put up. There are stalls for fun, frolic and games. Games like bows and arrows and other toys are bought by children.

Janmashtami Fair : The birthday of Lord Krishna, popularly known as Janmashtami, is celebrated with great pomp and splendour. It falls mostly in the month of August. Very big fairs are held at Mathura and Vrindavan, the places where Lord Krishna was born and brought up. Fairly big fairs are also held at thousands of other places in India. Artistically decorated tableaux depicting events from the life of Lord Krishna are exhibited at these places. People visit different temples. In Delhi there is a big congregation of devotees at the Laxminarain temple. The temples at Mathura and Vrindavan are tastefully decorated and the number of devotees visiting them is phenomenal.

Id Fair : Id-ul-Fitr is a very popular festival of Muslims and Id fairs are organised at many places. Muslim boys and girls put on new clothes and offer *namaz* at the local *masjid*. On way back, they purchase balloons and toys. *Id Milans* are organised by affluent people in which Hindus also participate in

large numbers.

Christmas Fair : December 25 is the birthday of Jesus Christ, the founder of Christianity. Christians go to the church on this day and offer prayers. Then they go to the Christmas fair and enjoy themselves. Such fairs are mostly held in the church premises. Children enjoy these fairs immensely.

Makar Sankranti and Eclipse Fairs : Great religious importance is attached to Makar Sankranti, solar eclipse and lunar eclipse, and on these days, people go out in large numbers to take bath in holy rivers like Ganges etc. where big fairs are held and alms are given on a large scale. At some places, such fairs are considered to be more sacred than the others; for example, it is considered very auspicious to take bath at Kurukshetra on the solar eclipse day



FAIRS OF UTTAR PRADESH

Fairs, big and small, are held in thousands in various cities and villages of Uttar Pradesh. In each district at least ten fairs are held every year. According to an official estimate, 86 fairs are organised in Mathura district, 79 in Kanpur, 79 in Hamirpur, 78 in Jhansi, 72 in Agra, 70 in Fatehpur, 11 in Almora, 14 in Chamoli, 16 in Dehradun, 18 in Pilibhit, 18 in Aligarh, 21 in Etah, and 21 in Deoria district each year. In most of these fairs, the number of participants runs into thousands and in about 30 to 40 fairs, their number exceeds several lakhs. In addition to this, there are hundreds of fairs associated with local deities in each village.

Garh Mukteshwar fair is the biggest fair held in November on the occasion of Kartik Purnima on the bank of river Ganga or any other river, wherein about five to six lakh people participate. Besides, the fairs at Khari in Bijnor district, Gajraula in Moradabad, Kachhla and Kakora in Badaun district, Chaubari in Bareilly district, Shuktal in Muzaffarnagar district, Anoopshahr in Bulandshahr district, Gangaghat in Unnao district, Ayodhya in Faizabad district, Baksaghat in Rae Bareilly district, Shringarampur in Farrukhabad district, Hastinapur in Meerut district etc. are organised on a large scale, and are worth visiting. At Ballia on the bank of Ganga, the Dadri fair is held for one week and is attended by lakhs of people. Ballia is known as a place associated with Bhrigu *rishi*. So this fair is also known as Bhrigu region fair. Likewise, the fair at Bithoor is held for fifteen days.

Several Ganga fairs are held on Amavasya of Magh (January-February) in different parts of the State. Among them, Maghi-snana fair held at Prayag is the most important.

Similarly at places where there are famous temples of Lord Shiva, fairs are held on Shivaratri day (February-March), when *Shaiva* devotees in large numbers assemble to celebrate the festival. On this day fairs are held at Vishwanath, Dashashvamedh and Annapoorna temples in Varanasi. At Alakhnath

temple, Madhinath temple, Tibarinath temple, and Dhopeshwarnath temple in Bareilly, big fairs are held on this day. During the month of Shravan (August), devotees in sizeable numbers gather at these temples on every Monday.

About 50 kms. away from Kannauj, towards south-east, there is the temple of Kheteshwar Mahadev. It is said that this temple was founded by Ashwatthama, a brave warrior during Mahabharat era. A big fair is held at this place on Shivaratri day.

During Navratras in March-April and October-November, big fairs are organised at places which have temples of Lord Rama and of goddess Durga. A very big fair takes place at Ayodhya on the occasion of Rama's birthday. At Varanasi, there is grand celebration at the time of Dussehra. Likewise, there is a big fair held at Vindhyavasini temple in Mirzapur district. On the full moon day of Chaitra (March-April), a big fair is held at a place known as Makhauda which is about 16 kms. away from Ayodhya. It is believed that at this place King Dashrath had performed a *yajna* to please the gods so that he may be blessed with a son.

At Mathura, the devotees of Lord Krishna celebrate Srikrishna Janmashtami with great zeal and gusto. People in thousands take part in the festivities.

On the occasions of Holi and Diwali, fairs held at different places are indeed worth-witnessing. Institutions like the Rotary Club organise 'Diwali Melas' at various parts of the State on quite a grand scale.

On the day next to Deepawali, very big fairs are held at the Annapoorna temple and at Vishwanath temple near Varanasi. At several places a competition is held among kite-flyers. It is a treat to see these competitions. In addition, wrestling bouts are also held in different villages. Some of the important places where these wrestling bouts are held have great festivities on Nagpanchmi (August-September) and Rakshabandhan (August) day. On these days wrestlers come from far and near and many leading wrestlers participate in these bouts. On Rakshabandhan day, the fair at Nahil (Shahjahanpur) also includes poetry recitation and other cultural activities.

The *Nauchandi* fair in Meerut is very famous. It starts on a Sunday two weeks after Holi and continues for fifteen days. There is a temple of Chandi on the Garh-Hapur Road just where the fair is held. The Muslims offer *chadar* at the Wale Mian ka Mazar. It is believed that during a battle in the 12th century



between Qutub-ud-din Aibek and a Jat king, the commander of Aibek's army, Wale Mian, lost his hand. Lakhs of people go to attend this fair. Merry-go-rounds, other entertainments, exhibitions, and several competitions along with cultural programmes are part of the fair. Cattle are also bought and sold on a large scale. There are various stage shows and poetry recitations by poets in different languages like Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu, etc. are also organised. Such programmes go on throughout the night. People enjoy these very much. There are folk songs and magic shows also. Sweetmeats, *halwa* and other delicacies are sold and bought with great relish.

In the beginning of winter season, in the months of October-November, there is a festival of King Kans held at Mathura and Fatehpur Sikri. A big paper cut-out of Kans is erected. At the appointed time, two children, acting as Krishna and Balram, come to this place and fight a battle with him and later set the effigy on fire.

In Uttar Pradesh, many small fairs are held at different places to celebrate Teej festival, which falls in July-August. Teej is a fair attended largely by women and girls of all ages. They sing songs and decorate the palms of their hands with henna. Not only do they sing songs and enjoy the swings but sometimes, there is a competition among the girls. The spirit of gay abandon is really infectious and one enjoys the festival thoroughly. One of the fairs famous for its peculiarity is known as the Bamboo Stick fair. This fair is held at Khathauli in Muzaffarnagar. There is another fair held at the tomb (*dargah*) of Peeran Kaliyar. This is held at Deoband. Another fair held at Barabanki is known as Devasharif fair and the one held at Bahraich is known as Qazi Mian fair, and yet another as Mauni Baba fair at Saiyadpur tehsil in Ghazipur district.

Varanasi is famous for its temples and fairs. Here a large number of fairs are held from time to time. There is a very famous fair held at Chausatti Ghat for 64 *Yoginis*. This is held in the month of March. Another famous fair is held for Chitraghanta goddess Durga on Chaitra Shukla Teej and Ashwini Shukla Tithiya. On the full moon day of Bhadrapad, there is a festival held at Kapalmochanmund.

The Doll fair at Allahabad has a charm of its own; likewise is the fair at Lucknow known as Burhvamangal fair, which attracts the devotees of Hanuman. In the fairs of Lucknow, one comes across interesting sights of white and black cock fights. In Unnao, there is the Takiawala fair. This is particularly famous for the sale of cattle. Besides, there is lot of wooden furniture and wooden craft

which is offered for sale here. Wooden and iron wares are also available at Pratapgarh fair.

Many fairs are held on the full moon day in the month of Kartik (October). In Agra, there is a fair held on this day which is known as Batesar fair. Batesar is about 60 kms. away from Agra towards the south-east. This fair continues for two weeks. Lakhs of people gather on this occasion. About one lakh cattle (mostly horses) are bought and sold. There is another fair at Soron. This fair starts four days before the full moon day and continues for eight days. It is largely organised near the temple of God Varah. Saeedsalar fair which takes place in Gorakhpur in the month of June, Urs fair of Hasanpur in Moradabad district and 'Flag Fair' of Dehradun which is held in Dehradun in March deserve special mention among the important fairs of Uttar Pradesh.

In Bundelkhand region near Mahobar, fairs of Bhoojariyons are held. Such fairs are also held in Madhya Pradesh. In Mirzapur, it is called Kajli fair. On this day women gather at a Kajaria pond and sing *Kajali* songs. Hastinapur in Meerut is a famous Jain pilgrimage centre. Here a big fair is held from Kartik Shukla Ashtami (the eighth day of the waning moon in the month of October) and ends on the full moon day. Another place famous for fairs is Chitrakoot. It is in Banda district and fairs are held here on Ramnavmi day and on Deepawali. Many fairs are held on full moon day, moonless night, eclipse days, etc.

Fairs in hilly areas : A large part of Uttar Pradesh consists of hills. In the hilly areas several fairs are held on Makar Sankranti, Navratri and Shivratri days. Nainital, Almora and Ranikhet abound with devotees who worship Nanda Devi. A big fair is held in August near Nanda Devi temple. Another festival is held at Joshimath in Garhwal.

Shivratri fairs are held at several places in Garhwal but the Bhikya Sain fair is the biggest of these. Dwarahat is a famous place near Ranikhet. Near this place is Brahmandeshwar, where Bikhauti or Vrish Sankranti fair takes place around 13th May. There is another place known as Dunagiri where a big fair is held in October. At Dwarahat also a big fair takes place at Salde In April.

In all these fairs, we see people singing and dancing ecstatically. At Makar Sankranti (14th January), the sun moves from the southern hemisphere (Dakshinayan) to the northern hemisphere (Uttarayan). That is why the fairs organised on this occasion are called 'Uttarayani' fairs. The Uttarayani fair held at Bageshwar is considered to be quite a big fair from the religious and commercial points of view. The Uttarayani fairs held at Karanprayag etc. in Garhwal

are also very famous. At a place near Rishikesh, called Vriddhkedar, a big fair is held on the bank of river Ganga. About 25-30 kms. away from Tanakpur in Pilibhit in Pithoragarh district is a place, Purnagiri, where a very big fair is held to worship *Devi* (goddess). Devotees come from far and near to attend this fair which is held in the month of March-April. Another fair is held in the month of January at Chandrabani Devi temple located between Devprayag and Tehri.

Another fair called Jauljibi fair is held from November 14 for three or four days. It is both a religious and a commercial fair and is held beyond the confluence of black Ganga and white (clear) Ganga, and on the way to Kailash mountain. In this fair Tibetans and Nepalis from neighbouring places come to transact business. They bring woollens and honey etc. and sell them on a large scale. A similar fair is also held at a place called Thal which is on the way from Askot to Almora.

Gabladev Fair. There is a beautiful valley, called Darma, near the Indo-Tibetan border. In this valley, a very famous fair is held in honour of Gabladev in the latter half of August, and continues for a week. Gabladev is the presiding deity of this valley. The people are called Shauka, and belong to Shakya tribe. Lord Buddha also belonged to this tribe. Fourteen villages of this valley participate in this fair. It is held at the extreme end of Indo-Tibetan border in the village Dandat. Thousands of people participating in the fair keep on singing the whole night, playing on their traditional musical instruments and dancing. During day time, they organise different types of competitions and also display their conventional weaponry.

The fairs held in hilly areas are very important. One comes across people from different hills and one can see their beautiful traditional ornaments and clothes. The swords and other war weapons are also on display. Those actively participating in the fair are called *Kautkyars*. Attending these fairs helps to gather some useful insights into the life and cultural aspects of the hilly areas.

FAIRS OF PUNJAB AND HARYANA

Fairs of Punjab : The biggest festival of Punjab is held every year on the 13th of April. It is called Baisakhi. It marks the beginning of the New Year. On this day, the Sun enters the zodiac signs, Aries and Taurus. So it is called Aries-Taurus Sankranti. It is the beginning of Vaishakh month of Shak Samvat. On this day, the whole of Punjab dances with ecstasy to the tunes of drums. The folk dance is called Bhangra, and is very popular. Another fair is held at Batala where Sikhs participate with gusto.

Fairs of Haryana : In Haryana, there are several ancient historical and religious places where festivals and fairs are held regularly. Thousands of years ago, the epic battle of Mahabharat was fought at Kurukshetra. At that time also thousands of people used to take bath in the Brahm Sarovar, and a very big fair used to be organised at that place. The tradition has continued ever since. During solar eclipse, people from different parts of India travel to this place to take a holy dip in the sacred Sarovar (pond). In the district of Mahendragarh, near Narnaul, at a place called Dhansi hill, a big fair, known as Somvati Amavasya fair, is held every year.

Several cattle fairs are held at different places in Haryana. Among these, the most famous is the cattle fair at Jahajgarh near Rohtak. It has been so famous that the Viceroy of India, Lord Linlithgo, once visited the site.

There is a religious place, Kapalmochan, in Sindhuvan in Haryana. A fair is held here in October-November on the full moon day. It is about 20 kms. from Jagadhari in Ambala district. Thousands of Punjabis and people from other parts of the country participate in this fair. It is believed that this fair is so famous and ancient that Lord Rama and Lord Krishna had also come to see this fair. Guru Gobind Singh was of the view that Guru Nanak was born in 1688, and so every year, a four-day-long fair is held here to commemorate the occasion.

There is a small town called Pihova near Kurukshetra. It is an ancient pilgrim place which is associated with the memory of great men like Prithu, Yayati, Pururva, Brihaspati, Kripacharya etc. At this place, a fair is held for five days during the waxing moon in November at the Prithvishwar temple. A special fair is held on Chaitra Amavasya and Ashwini Amavasya. In this fair, widows gather together and mourn the death of their husbands. This practice owes its origin to the Mahabharat when thousands of soldiers were killed in the battle, and left behind thousands of widows to mourn for them.



FAIRS OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Laddakh in Jammu and Kashmir is a predominantly Buddhist place. There are several ancient Buddhist shrines and religious Maths (sanctuaries) here which are run by Lamas. About 40 kms. from Leh, there is a famous ancient Buddhist math 'Hammis Gompa'. Padmasambhava, an Indian scholar, who had preached Bouddha religion in Tibbet was born several centuries ago. The Bouddha fair of Hammis Gompa is held in his memory on the 10th of June every year. This fair is held for three days. In this fair Lamas sing and dance, and it really is a treat to see them do so. They put on different kinds of masks and dance. Buddhist religious scriptures, texts and other articles are also sold in this fair.

In Srinagar, Urs, a religious fair, is held near the tomb of the Saint Shah Hamdan, who was an Iranian and was born about 600 years ago. Muslims from different places come in large numbers to attend this festival.

A very special fair is held in Kashmir at the temple of Ksheer Bhawani in the month of May. This place is 22 kms. away from Srinagar. In this fair, milk, milk products and flowers are offered to the goddess by a big congregation of devotees. The Vaishno Devi temple near Jammu is very famous. Pilgrimage to this temple continues throughout the year but during Navratras (March-April and September-October), there is a great rush of pilgrims to this temple.

About 100 kms. from Jammu and about 2 kms. above Pancheri valley, is the temple of Sankari deity. Towards the end of September, there is a festival which is celebrated with great pomp and show. This festival is called Jatar. There is a very vast plain ground near Sankari. At this place, a bonfire is burnt and the devotees, both, men and women, spend the entire night singing and dancing. They also ask for a boon and, when their wish is fulfilled, they offer gold, silver, brass, copper and iron chains (*sankals*) to the deity. That is why the deity is called Sankari deity. This fair continues for a week.

FAIRS OF DELHI

Delhi is the Capital of India. Therefore, it is but natural that cultural fairs continue to be held here throughout the year. Every year, big gatherings of devotees offer prayers at many temples of Durga and Kali goddesses in different parts of the city. At least, twice in a year during Navratra days (March-April and September-October), big fairs are held at the famous temples of these goddesses in Delhi. These fairs are attended by a good number of devotees. The Jhandewalan Devi temple at the Karol Bagh-Rani Jhansi Road intersection, Katyayani Devi temple at Chhatarpur (in the south of Delhi near Mehrauli), and the Kalkaji temple are some of the temples where such fairs are organised and a large number of devotees attend them. These fairs are really worth witnessing.

During Navratra days, Ramlilas are staged at about 10,000 places in Delhi. At the sites of Ramlilas, big fairs are organised, which are attended by people in thousands.

The birthday of Lord Krishna is celebrated with great zeal and enthusiasm in Delhi. There is a big congregation of devotees at the Laxminarain temple and other temples in Delhi. These fairs are also worth seeing.

Besides, on the occasions of Holi and Deepawali, various clubs and institutions in Delhi organise Deepawali and Holi fairs which are attended by a fairly large number of people.

Phool Walon ki Sair held near Mehrauli in September is also a fair of its own kind. Hindus and Muslims get together to participate in it in a large number. A colourful procession is taken out to the tomb of Khwaja Saheb offering him floral fans along with prayers and then it goes to the temple of Yogamaya to offer prayers. In the evening a cultural programme is also organised.

FAIRS OF HIMACHAL PRADESH

It is customary in Himachal Pradesh to hold cultural and religious fairs. In all these fairs, one can witness superabundance of folk songs and folk dances. Fairs are held in the memory of great men like Manu and Parshuram. In Manali, a fair is organised in the memory of our ancestor, Manu. Manali is a beautiful hill station. Thousands of years ago a great saint, Manu, lived there. He was the first law giver to the world and Manali is credited with the distinction of holding a fair in his memory.

In Sirmaur there is a lake called Renuka. During the month of November, a fair is held here for five days in memory of Parshuram and his mother, Renuka. People from far and near come to participate in the fair, and they bring the statue of Parshuram in a palanquin. They then lower the statue to the water level till it touches the water of the lake, as if a son is touching the feet of his mother. Then amid applause shouts, singing and dancing, the statue is placed in the temple. Several cultural programmes are organised during this fair.

The Dussehra festivities at Kullu are famous all over the country. On this day all the deities of Kullu gather and offer prayers to Raghunathji. This festival continues during September-October. The devotees from the nearby villages carry the deities on their shoulders and walk upto 100 to 150 kms. to reach Kullu. The Raghunath statue in Kullu is made of gold, and is placed in a wooden chariot. Then a procession is taken out. The chariot is pulled by hundreds of men. Other deities are also taken out in the procession. On its course, it is joined by government officials, citizens and even persons belonging to the royal family. The procession stops at the fair ground, and the fair continues for five days. On the final day 'Lanka', which is built on the bank of river Beas, is burnt down, after which the devotees retreat.

Markandeya fair is held on the Baisakhi day (April 13) in Bilaspur district. Some other fairs held here are Nayna Devi fair and Nalwar fair. In Bilaspur other famous fairs are Basant Panchmi fair and Kali Devi fair. In August, on the

occasion of Gugga Navmi, big fairs take place at Bilaspur, Kangra, Mandi, etc. in honour of local deity Peer Gugga Zahir.

The ancient fair of Labi is held in Rampur in the month of Kartik. Woollen carpets, artistic spread-outs, blankets etc. are sold on a large scale in this fair lasting three days. In addition to this, there are various games, sports and folk dances also.

Chamba is a beautiful hill station 915 mts. above the sea level, overlooking the river Ravi that flows at the foot of this hill. The Minjhar fair of Chamba is very famous. It is held on the last Sunday of July or the first Sunday of August to appease the gods so that the place may have a good harvest of Minjhar which means maize. The special feature of the fair is the tradition of offering a coconut, a silver coin and a grain of maize to the river by thousands of people. The Trilokinath fair of Chamba is held in the month of March-April, heralding the onset of spring.





FAIRS OF RAJASTHAN

The Pushkar fair is very famous in Rajasthan. There is a temple of Lord Brahma near the Pushkar lake. This is a world famous temple. The fair here begins on the day of Kartik Shukla Ekadashi and continues till the full moon day in the month of November, and thus completes five days of celebration. This fair has a charm of its own because of a very large number of shops here displaying and selling ornaments, clothes, sweetmeats, plastic goods, idols, etc. but, above all, there is a large-scale selling and buying of cattle, particularly camels, cows and buffaloes. The Pushkar lake water is said to contain sulphur and other minerals of medicinal value which cure many diseases. A very large number of devotees take bath in the lake. On the last day of the fair, people make oblation of cooked rice to their manes (Pind-daan).

In Ajmer, another big fair called Urs is organised in the memory of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti in May/June. People come from all over the country, but the majority is of Muslims. *Sufi* literature, attractive bed-spreads, ornaments, necklaces, bangles, gold and silver-thread clothes, utensils, etc. are sold in this fair. Qawwali singers excel each other in singing the praises of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti.

There is a famous Hanuman temple at Rainwal, about 30 kms. from Jaipur. A big fair is held here, and devotees throng this place in thousands. Diggi is about 75 kms. from Jaipur. Here is a temple of Kalyanji, the god of invalids. The blind, lame, armless, deaf, dumb, and those suffering from physical disabilities visit this temple to seek the blessings of their god. Special fairs are held at this temple thrice in a year i.e. on the Shravan Purnima (July), Vaishakh Purnima (August) and Ekadashi (August).

FAIRS OF MADHYA PRADESH

Ujjain has, since time immemorial, been acknowledged as a seat of culture in Madhya Pradesh, and is particularly famous for fairs. The Kumbh fair is held here once in twelve years on the bank of Kshipra river. A big fair is held here on Kartik Poornima.

Several other fairs of Madhya Pradesh are worth witnessing. Gangaur fairs are very popular in Malwa and Nimar. On the occasion of Gangaur, Gauri or Parvati is worshipped. A fair for women is held at the bank of a lake or a river where a beautiful statue of the goddess is made. Women, both married and unmarried, offer prayers there and dance around it. Bangles, *sindoor*, *mahavar*, flowers, clothes, *naivedya*, *chandan*, *dhoop*, *akshat*, etc. are offered to the goddess. Married women apply *sindoor* in their hair parting after offering it to the goddess and pray for the long life of their husbands.

On the occasion of Bhujaria, many fairs are held in the Baghelkhand region. The green saplings of Bhujaria are offered to the near and dear ones. Then the women slowly wend their way in a procession to a river to immerse the Bhujaria. Ahead of them is a gathering of men who dance and sing all the way. Children enjoy the rides in merry-go-rounds and swings. Such fairs are held in Sagar, Rewa and Jabalpur with a lot of enthusiasm.

Madhya Pradesh is also inhabited by a sizeable population of Bhils and Gonds. Maunia, members of the Gond community, dance in fairs organised on the day following Deepawali. They are called Maunias because they observe *maun* — silence — on the day of the festival.

Bhils of Jhabua region participate in their Bhagoria fair around the festival of Holi. They select their life partners in this fair. If an unmarried male applies *gula* on the forehead of an unmarried girl, it means that he wants to marry her. If the girl is willing, she also reciprocates the gesture in the same way. Then the male takes the female to his house. The family of the youth sends a proposal to the girl's parents that they are willing to marry their son to the girl. If it is accepted, the marriage is solemnised at a later date.

In Jhabua region, the Christian Bhils celebrate Christmas on the 23rd December. Men, women and children dance and sing throughout the night in this fair called Padri No Melo.

FAIRS OF GUJARAT AND MAHARASHTRA

Fairs of Gujarat : Many colourful fairs take place in Gujarat in which people's rejoicings know no bounds. Tarānetor, meaning the third eye of Lord Shiva, is such an interesting fair. This fair continues for two days. Another famous fair, namely Bhavanath fair, is held at Girnar hills on the occasion of Shivratri. Hundreds of entertaining fairs are organised at various places in Gujarat where *Garba* and *Rasra* dances are performed, which are indeed a sight to see. People sit in the merry-go-rounds, sing and play on the flute. Several fairs are held on the full moon day in Kartik (November) at Bausa, Sabarkantha, Siddhpur etc.

Fairs of Maharashtra : In Maharashtra, the deities popular among the masses are Ganesh, Vitthal (Vishnu) and Devi. Ganesh Chaturthi (in August-September) is celebrated throughout the length and breadth of Maharashtra and the celebrations continue for as long as 11 days. During India's struggle for freedom, Lokmanya Tilak had exhorted people to celebrate the occasion as a popular fair in order to create a feeling of oneness among Indians. Till today, this fair is held in a very large number of cities and villages of Maharashtra. In a procession, the idol of Ganesh is taken out amidst drum-beating and singing, and, in the end, it is immersed in the river.

The Vaishnav devotees of Varkari Panth go to Pandharpur for pilgrimage. This is situated on the bank of the river Chandrabhaga. At this place, Jnaneshwar, Namdev, Samarth Ramdas and Shivaji had walked all the way to the temple to impress upon the people its importance. So a fair is held for five days at Pandharpur in the month of November. On the day next to the full moon, people take the *prasad* of Shri Krishna and return. It is purely a religious fair. Everywhere people sing the praises of Vitthal. Vitthal fairs are also held on the eleventh day of the rising moon on Magh Shukla Ekadashi (February), Chaitra Shukla Ekadashi (March) and Ashadh Shukla Ekadashi (July).

In July, a big fair is held in memory of Sant Namdev at Pandharpur which



is attended by a large number of Varkari devotees. Devotees from other parts of the country also come to attend this fair. In Paithan, a fair is held in February-March to remember Sant Eknath.

Another fair is held in the memory of Sant Tukaram at Dehu near Pune in February-March. A fair in memory of Sant Jnaneshwar is held at Alandi village in September. People gather at Sajjargarh in February in the memory of Samarth Ramdas and take active part in the fair held there. At Shirdi, a big fair is organised in memory of Sain Baba during September-October.

Nasik is the modern name for Panchvati. It was here that Lord Rama, Sita and Lakshman had stayed for a very long time and Shurpanakha's nose was cut by Lakshman. Ravana had kidnapped Sita from this very place. So a big fair is held here in memory of Lord Rama on the occasion of Ramanavami.

Besides, there are thousands of small temples where festivities are organised during Navratras. Tuljapur's presiding deity is goddess Bhawani and that of Mahurgarh is goddess Renuka. Special fairs are organised at these places during Navratras by the devotees to make obeisance to the goddesses.

FAIRS OF BIHAR

There are many historical and religious places in Bihar where fairs are held in remembrance of great souls. At Vaishali a very big fair is held in memory of Mahavir Swami, the last religious preceptor of Jainism, who was born at this place, on his birth-day in April every year. People from all parts of India visit this place on this occasion. Jain preachers give discourses which are listened to with rapt attention by the people.

At Pavapuri, Mahavir Nirvan fair is held in November. Here also Jain devotees from different parts of the country come to pay their respects. Devotional songs are sung. Children feed the fishes in tanks with roasted rice and light lamps in the evening. Finally, there is the chariot procession which marks the end of the fair.

At Bodh Gaya, a very big festival is held on the full moon night in April-May. Buddhists from Sikkim, Bhutan, Tibet, Burma and Japan visit this place on this day. Buddhist preachers give discourses. Traders from far and near bring their merchandise to sell. Rajgrah of Bihar is very famous as it is associated with Lord Buddha, Lord Mahavir and King Ajatshatru. There are many temples and historical remains here which are indeed worth seeing. People visit these places throughout the year. Here one comes across many sulphur springs and tanks whose hot water has medicinal value and can cure many ailments. Makar fair, held on Makar Sankranti at this place, is very famous. Cattle are bought and sold in large numbers in this fair.

At Sinheshwar in Sirsa district of Bihar, a big fair at the Shiva temple is held on Shivratri. Government sponsored exhibitions, sale of cattle and various entertainment programmes are some of the special features of this fair. Another famous fair, known as Harihar fair, is held at Sonpur. It is acclaimed to be the biggest fair of Asia. It starts on the full moon day in Kartik (November) and lasts for about one month. *Hari* means Vishnu and *Har* means Shiva. In the temple of Shiva, there is also the idol of Vishnu, and hence the name, *Harihar*. There

is the confluence of Ganga and Gandak at this place. On the opposite side is the *Dak Bungalow* of Hajipur, which is also a railway station. This place is joined with Patna by a bridge over the Ganga, which makes it easy for the people from the south of Bihar to come to the fair.

In Harihar, people come for a holy bath on days of Shivratri, solar and lunar eclipses and all Sankrantis. But the fair at Sonpur has a charm of its own because of various government-sponsored exhibitions and entertainment stalls put up there. Another noteworthy feature of the Sonpur fair is that thousands of people from far-off places come here only to sell and buy cattle. Buffaloes from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, cows from Punjab and Haryana and horses from Bhutan and Nepal are brought here for sale. Elephants and baby elephants from Assam which can be kept as pets and multicoloured birds are also offered for sale.



FAIRS OF POORVANCHAL

Fairs of Assam : The New Year in Assam starts, like in Punjab, on 13th April. A festival called Bihu is celebrated here with great pomp and eclat on that day. Fairs are also held in villages and cities on this occasion and people attired in multi-coloured clothes, indulge in all sorts of merry-making.

Fairs of Arunachal Pradesh : A big religious fair is held at the Parshuram kund in Lohit district of Arunachal in memory of Rishi Parshuram. This fair is held on Makar Sankranti day.

Buddhism is prevalent in this State. Lufra (donation of Buddha's statue) festival is celebrated here with great gusto both, individually at homes and, collectively. When the festival is celebrated collectively, it assumes the form of a religious fair. People come from far and near to participate in this fair. They come singing devotional songs, and carry a statue of Lord Buddha on their shoulders. They first move about in a procession in their village and then bring the statue to the venue of the fair. A sort of religious pavilion is erected near the house of the donor of the statue. This pavilion is tastefully decorated and the people assemble there. Then this statue and also the statues donated by others are worshipped and then taken to the *Budh Vihar* for being handed over to the authorities.

Fairs of West Bengal : In West Bengal, the river Ganga falls into the ocean at Gangasagar near Calcutta. A big fair is held here in January. Another fair is held in December at Mayapur in Navdweep. In this fair, the statue of goddess Bhadrakali is worshipped. This place is the birth-place of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, a great devotee of Lord Krishna. So *Rasleelas* are organised here which are witnessed by people coming from various parts of the country. In Hughly district, there is a famous Shiva temple, called Taraknath. In March, Gajan fair is held here on the Sankranti day which draws a big crowd. The ecstasy of the poor and the down-trodden in this fair is indeed a sight to see. They dress up as the attendants (Ganas) of Lord Shiva and dance in numerous

ways. The devotees of Kali perform Chamunda dance in this fair. The dancers wear garlands of human skulls around their necks, carry swords in their hands, and don a mask of Kali. The spectators enjoy the sight.

At Shanti Niketan, where Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore founded the 'Vishwabharti' University, cultural programmes take place at the end of January. They coincide with a big fair organised there. The Baols of Bengal enliven these programmes with their romantic songs. A religious fair is held in Kenduli village in Birbhum district annually in memory of the great Vaishnava poet, Jaidev, who had composed Geet Govind. People offer prayers and sing songs at his temple.

Fairs of Orissa : Jagannath Puri is very famous in Orissa. The temple of Jagannath here is world famous. A big chariot procession is taken out here in June-July in which lakhs of people participate. Every year a new chariot is constructed on which the statues of Jagannath, i.e. Shri Krishna, Balram, and Subhadra, are seated. Thousands of devotees pull this chariot out of their love and devotion for the deities.

In Cuttack, there is a fair in October-November which is known as Bali voyage. In ancient times many traders of Orissa used to go to Bali to sell their merchandise. Some of them would settle there or some were drowned in the sea in course of their long voyages, and could never return to Orissa. This fair is held for them and the earthen lamps are lighted for a whole month in their memory. This fair is held for seven days. It is an important commercial fair.

DAKSHINACHAL FAIRS

Fairs of Andhra : At Bhadrachalam which is situated at a distance of 267 kms. from Vijaywada, there is a Rama temple on the bank of the river Godavari. On the eleventh day of the waxing moon in December, a big fair is held here which is attended by lakhs of people. Such a fair is held in April on the Ramnavmi day also.

In the Kotapkonda region of Guntur district, there is a temple of Swami Koteswar on the hills. A very big fair is held on Shivratri day at this temple. In this fair, toys, bangles, clothes, edibles, fruits, agricultural implements, bamboo products and cattle are bought and sold. The devotees also bring with them about 500 well-decorated *Prabhas*. Prabha is a fort-like structure made of bamboo sticks. It is placed on two bullock carts. On the upper portion of a Prabha, bells are tied and above them are placed well-decorated pitchers. The devotees pull these Prabhas into the temple.

Among the special fairs of Andhra Pradesh, one held at Yellamma temple at Mandpak in Tanuku district of Western Godavari is very famous. A big fair is organised in front of Matangi Devi temple at Kolletikota in Krishna district in March every year and the festivities continue for 16 days there. About the same time, another fair is held at the tomb of Shaiva Saint Karibsav in Anantpur district. On the full moon day in March, a Garga procession is taken out and a big fair is held in the memory of Saint Karibsav. This fair lasts for a week.

A fair is held for four days at the temple of the local deity, Durgamma at Sangreddy in Medak district during August-September. The Venkateswar Swami fair at Nizamabad is held for fifteen days in the month of August. A flag is hoisted at one place. Later, it is taken to the temple of Tirupati in district Chittoor and then brought back. So it is also known as Flag fair.

A fair is held at the temple of Lord Vishnu, called Laxmi-Narsingh Swami, for 12 days in March-April, and the festivities go on during this period.



Ramulingeshwar temple, having an idol of Lord Shiva, in Nalgonda district attracts devotees in a fair held here for five days around Shivaratri. More than ten thousand people participate in the fair. Gattle are also sold in the fair.

Fairs of Tamilnadu : A fair is held in Tamilnadu in January on the death anniversary of Saint Thyagaraj. He was a poet, singer, and saint of Andhra; his tomb is in Tiruvarut, about 13 kms. from Tanjavur. Young singers believe that if they offer honey at the tomb of Thyagaraj and sing verses composed by him there, their voice will become sweet and melodious. Another fair held here is called Saptsthanotsavam, in which Lord Panchnadishwar's statue is taken out in a procession. At Chidambaram, is a world famous temple of Nataraj Shiva where a fair is held in December. The total turnout there is to the tune of one lakh.

Fairs of Karnataka : Mysore in Karnataka is very famous for its Dussehra fair in which all people — rich-poor, literate-illiterate-participate. Shravanbelgol is a famous place of pilgrimage for the Jains. This Jain pilgrimage has a 17 mts. tall statue of Gommateshwar Bahubali, whose coronation ceremony is held every twelfth year. People come from all over the country to participate in this ceremony and a big fair is also held at that time. They offer even ornaments of gold and silver on the coronation day.

Fairs of Kerala : The Shabri Malay fair is very popular in Kerala. *Malay* means mountain. On Shabri mountain there is a temple known as Ayyappan temple which reminds us of Lord Rama and Shabri. The fair is held in the month of November. At this time the Sun enters the zodiac sign Scorpio. The dense forest around the temple is infested with elephants and tigers, but the devotees manage to reach the temple by invoking their god to protect them. There are eighteen steps leading to the temple; so people try to go to the Shabri Malay fair eighteen times.

Another leading fair is Pooram, held in the month of March/April. This fair is held in the temple of Shiva and Parvati. The idols from other neighbouring temples are also placed on decorated elephants and taken round the place. In the centre is the elephant carrying the idol of Shiva and Parvati. After going round the place, the idols are taken to a big open space near the temple. The fair starts in the evening with fireworks and illuminations and continues throughout the night.

Another important fair is at Ochchira. At this place, the fair is held for twelve days. In this fair no idol or temple is worshipped. Invalids, disabled and

lepers are given food; and mud from under the banyan tree is applied on the forehead. The devotees stay in huts for twelve days and spend their time remembering the Lord. At Ochchira, there are lively demonstrations of traditional martial arts also in the month of May.

Onam fair is held with great zeal and fervour. A boat race is held on this day. On the southern tip of Kerala on the bank of Pampa river, Lord Krishna is worshipped in the Parthasarthy temple of Aranmoola. The Nairs decorate the boats and then a boat race is organised. These boats are about 15 mts. long and fairly broad. Several people can sit in these. On one side the boat looks like the hood of a snake and, on the other side, it is like snake's tail. These boats are rowed with chanting of songs to enthuse the boatmen. This fair of boat races is something unique to the Indian cultural mosaic.



SOME NEW FAIRS

India achieved independence in 1947 and became a Republic in 1950. The Government started some fairs, which, per-force, had an economic bias, though they also highlighted the cultural traits of the country.

In Delhi, the World Book Fair is organised once in two years by the National Book Trust, a government agency. Leading publishers of the world participate in this fair. They bring books and put up stalls. One comes across books on different subjects and in different languages. It attracts a big crowd.

The International Trade Fair has become a regular feature in Delhi for the past several years. It exhibits Indian and international advancement in science and technology. Different stalls and pavilions of various States are put up in this fair. Trade fairs are periodically held all over the country.

Near the border of Haryana and Delhi is Surajkund, built by Tomar King Surajpal in the tenth century. Around this place, a handicrafts fair is held for fifteen days. In that fair, one comes across masters of handicrafts from different parts of the country and gets an opportunity to see their craftsmanship. Many of these master craftsmen have been recipients of prizes instituted by the Government. At the Surajkund fair, chosen rural handicrafts are put on exhibition. Earthen statues, brass idols and toys, beautiful sarees, ivory merchandise, beautiful dolls, and thousands of toys — all these attract the crowds. There are *henna* shops where *henna* is applied on the palms of women. Magicians, bear and monkey trainers impress every one with their training of the animals.

Special fairs : Some fairs are very special. One of them is the fair held on November 14, the birthday of Jawaharlal Nehru, which is declared as the Children's Day. Then there are the Deepawali fairs which are held at a number of places. Besides, there are the Independence Day and the Republic Day celebrations and the fairs held on the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi.

THE MESSAGE

Fairs are, more often than not, associated with historical sagas, legends, anecdotes, and events; for example, the Kumbh is associated with the churning of ocean as mentioned in Indian mythology. India is a land of great men, saints and festivals. It's no wonder every year hundreds of fairs are held all over the country. These fairs serve to remind us of the noble deeds of our great men and women who brought glory to our country and our culture and bring home to us the message embodied in the following immortal lines of a great poet —

*"Shahidon ki chitaon par lagenge har baras mele
Watan par mitne walon ka yehi baki nishan hoga"*

(Fairs and festivals will continue till eternity,
To honour those who sacrificed themselves for posterity.)

Fairs, on the one hand, remind us of our great ancestors, while on the other, they underline the fact that this world itself is a big fair. Just as in a fair, the hustle and bustle soon reaches a crescendo and then subsides, so is the case with our lives. This world is kaleidoscopically illusory. At one place, its glory seems to be touching its zenith and at the other, it appears to be sinking to its nadir. That is why Indian saints and seers have likened this world to a fair. In this world, like the fair, people come for a short time and depart. Our ancestors, who handed down this highly philosophical message of fairs to us, themselves took active part in the fairs and enhanced their importance by their gracious presence.

Fairs not only fill life with fun, entertainment, and enthusiasm but also bring together men from different places and different walks of life. They foster love and fellow-feeling, and go a long way to bring about national and social integration. That is why fairs have occupied an important position in India at all times. They entertain the children and the old alike. Our fairs are famous all over the world. They carry the message of our culture and religion. They provide insight into our history and have always been a source of joy and entertainment to us.

□□□

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